Review of the University of Maryland Policy and Procedures for the Establishment and Review of Centers and Institutes

February 2020

Background

In 2017, the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) voted to charge the Research Council with review of the University of Maryland Policy and Procedures for the Establishment and Review of Centers and Institutes (IV-1.00[A]). The policy has not been revised since it was approved in 1991, though the University's educational and research mission has evolved since that time. The SEC noted that a comprehensive review of the policy would allow the University to assess how the policy aligns with its mission and strategic initiatives.

The review was delayed to allow the new Vice President for Research to provide input. The Senate leadership and the Provost agreed to further delay the charge to the Research Council until the June 2019 report of the Research Institute Advisory Committee had been completed. The Research Council received its charge on June 3, 2019 and began planning initial steps to gather information regarding current centers and institutes at the University. The charge asked that the Research Council, chaired by George Hurtt, review the current policy, peer institution policies, the recommendations of the Research Institute Advisory Committee, data on existing UMD centers & institutes, and any associated best practices; consult with the Provost's Office, the Senate Faculty Affairs Committee, and faculty and graduate students engaged in centers & institutes; and consider the definitions of centers & institutes, the role of graduate students and the impact of any potential organizational changes, and whether sunsetting provisions or probationary status should be incorporated into the policy.

Work to Date

As of the writing of this report, the following activities have taken or are taking place:

- The Research Council has reviewed the current 1991 policy.
- Information on centers and institutes has been requested from each UMD college.
- Center and institute directors were invited to a forum to collect input and feedback on their experiences. Other sessions were held with the deans and with graduate students.
- A survey was sent to center directors and faculty and students engaged in centers & institutes.
- The feedback from the forum, sessions, and survey was carefully reviewed and compiled into a document of major themes for the Council's review.
- Peer data (Big Ten and other peers) has been gathered and best practices were compiled to serve as a resource to the Council as it works to revise the policy.

Preliminary Findings

Overall, initial findings from peer data show that most schools have a more organized process for centers and institutes. The current UMD policy touches on many of the key elements identified in best practices, but the policy is ambiguous and does not give enough structure to the process to ensure that it is consistently followed or enforced. The Research Council's initial findings are as follows:

- *There is no central repository of centers & institutes at the University.* While efforts have been made to gather and update this material (once in 2018 and again more recently), it is unclear who is responsible for making adjustments and on what schedule. It is also unclear what information should be included (Director? URL? Number of employees? Dollars [internal v. external]? Reporting structure?). Until this point, the process has involved going to the budget officers of different units and asking for them to self-report any changes in information and results have been uneven and difficult to verify.
- *There are no clear, stated definitions or levels at the University* of what constitutes a center versus an institute; different types of centers (departmental, collegiate, inter-collegiate, university-wide); or bureaus, laboratories, research teams. In line with this point, there needs to be a better understanding of how scale, size, purpose, and funding model(s) aligns with the different types of centers, institutes, or other entities.
- *There needs to be more clarity about what aspect of the University mission a center or institute supports.* There is an articulated desire to ensure that it be made clear that the mission extends beyond research to include education and service. Graduate students, in particular, were vocal about a center or institutes role in attracting students and providing training and employment opportunities.
- *There is no formal establishment or approval process for new centers and institutes at the University.* Other institutions have policies that detail the specific information that is required when proposing a center or institute. A number had comprehensive forms that are in use that could be used as models for UMD. Proposals at peers require information on alignment with the University's mission, impact on society or the research community, organizational structure or business plan, assessment of overlap with existing centers at the institution, funding arrangements, proposed benchmarks for success, and other operational details.
- *There are no consistent guidelines on structure/operations at the University.* Other universities tend to have much more robust and clear structures. At peers, the director is named immediately; an advisory committee is established; the director may only be a tenured faculty member unless the chancellor makes an exception, and there are formal governance structures.
- *With regard to funding, clarification is needed on institutional support and DRIF return rates.* There does not seem to be a lot of information publicly available about DRIF return percentages at other institutions. At UMD, the

dean is responsible for identifying funding sources, and long-term support and/or higher DRIF return rates are negotiated at a higher level.

- *There is no standard review process (internal and/or external).* Most institutions use a five-year term, though there is some deviation. Most institutions have lists of review criteria and most of the metrics by which an entity will be judged are created at the outset. There are formal processes and review committee composition requirements. There are existing templates and forms that could be adjusted for UMD's purposes.
- *There are no existing sunset provisions at the University* and no sense of what criteria should be used in determining when and how to close, revise, or repurpose a center or institute. Other institutions have criteria and a clear process by which all of these scenarios may play out. One key component of transitioning or sunsetting centers or institutes is ensuring that attention is paid to establishing a carefully thought out plan for the orderly transfer or termination of non-faculty personnel.
- *There are no probationary periods at the University;* either those created when a new center or institute is being created or those enacted after a less than wholly positive review. These do exist at a number of other institutions.

Preliminary Directions

As a result of the feedback received and research conducted by the Research Council, the Council developed the following preliminary directions to guide its revision of the policy. The Research Council intends to revise the current policy to add clarity and additional key principles identified at peers, while maintaining flexibility in order to encourage and optimize the critical role that centers and institutes play at the University.

- Database: The University should create and maintain a central database of all centers and institutes. The database should include a public-facing list of all centers and institutes as well as an internal component with more detailed information such as size, funding, research area(s), administrative structure, outcomes of last reviews, etc. The database should be regularly updated.
- Levels: The current levels in the policy (group, center, institute or bureau) should be retained but there should be more granularity to the definition of a center based upon the organizational, administrative, or reporting structure in order to be clearer about the different types of centers at the University. The granularity in center definition can be used to guide the establishment and review procedures. The Research Council has begun to consider offering guidance about how to address evolution of entities and movement between the levels (from center to institute, for example.)
- Proposal: The approval process for a new center or institute should be guided by a proposal that requires proponents to address key elements, such as the role of the proposed center, how it fits within the University's mission, whether and how it engages graduate students, and what metrics or benchmarks it will use to assess performance.

- Mission: The proposal/review processes should include a requirement for entities to identify how they contribute to the research, teaching, and/or service aspects of the University's mission. This should apply to centers and institutes, but not groups.
    - Centers and institutes would be required to address both the educational and research missions in the proposal and review processes. Including graduate students in its work would be one way of addressing the educational mission.
    - The University would encourage graduate student participation in centers and institutes and include information on graduate student engagement in the proposal and review processes.
    - The policy would include information on the potential impact a center or institute has on graduate student programs in the proposal and review processes
- Review process: There should be more specificity in the review process for centers and institutes, perhaps based upon the "type" or "level" of center involved. However, a review process should not be required for groups.
- Sunset provisions: Sunset provisions should not be required to be built in from the outset. However, in the wake of a negative review, procedures for sunsetting a center or institute should be specified.
- Probationary Status: New centers and institutes should be created with a probationary status and the term of this status should align with the term of a typical review cycle so that it may be determined at the first review whether the probationary period should be extended; if it should be lifted; or if the entity should be sunsetted.
- Remaining discussion points: The Research Council intends to discuss further how reorganizations, restructurings, and renamings should be addressed in the policy; and how to transition existing centers and institutes to the new policy and review processes.

Timeline and Next Steps

The Research Council is reviewing all of the feedback that has been gathered and reviewing the peer research and best practices information. It is in the process of discussing and developing key principles that will guide the development of policy language. Once policy revisions have been drafted, feedback must be gathered from stakeholders and from the Office of General Council before the policy revisions can be finalized and brought back to the Senate for a vote.

The Research Council's deadline for completing this charge is March 30.